

Message Text

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ACTION IO-13

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6185

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

USUN NEW YORK 379

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4325

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PORG, ASEAN, SN, VN

SUBJECT: SRV MEMBERSHIP IN UNITED NATIONS

REF: SINGAPORE 4022

1. ON SEPTEMBER 15 GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED STRAITS TIMES (ST) EDITORIALIZED THAT REASON GIVEN FOR U.S. DECISION TO VETO SRV UN MEMBERSHIP, WHILE POSSESSING SOME VALIDITY, WAS PROBABLY DESIGNED MORE TO "WIN VOTES" THAN TO (IN SECRETARY KISSINGER'S WORDS) "BOLSTER THE INDEPENDENCE OF OUR FRIENDS, ENCOURAGE RESTRAINT OF FORMER FOES AND HELP CHART A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE PATTERN OF RELATIONS WITHIN THE REGION". ST COMMENTED THAT IF THE MIA ISSUE IS THE ONLY JUSTIFICATION THE WHITE HOUSE CAN THINK OF FOR THE INTENDED VETO IT REVEALS "AN ABSENCE OF A CREDIBLE AMERICAN POLICY TOWARDS MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA". ST OBSERVED THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN "FAR MORE HELPFUL" FOR THE U.S. TO HAVE SIGNALLED HANOI THAT AMERICAN "NON-OPPOSITION TO VIETNAMESE ENTRY INTO THE UN INTER ALIA IS FIRMLY TIED TO THE GOOD BEHAVIOR OF THE INDOCHINESE COMMUNISTS

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TOWARDS THEIR NEIGHBORS."

2. EDITORIAL POINTED OUT THAT VIETNAM'S INTEREST IN ACQUIRING AMERICAN AID AND TECHNOLOGY AND IN BECOMING LESS RELIANT ON THE SOVIET UNION OFFERED WASHINGTON THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A FRESH AND POSITIVE APPROACH TOWARDS INDO-CHINA. IF PLAYED CORRECTLY, THE U.S. COULD "OFFSET THE ENORMOUS INFLUENCE THERE WHICH THE RUSSIANS HAVE ALREADY BUILT UP." EDITORIAL CONCLUDED THAT "IF IT IS TOO MUCH TO EXPECT A RATIONAL INITIATIVE IN THE LAST MONTHS OF THE FORD ADMINISTRATION," THEN WHOEVER BECOMES PRESIDENT IN JANUARY "CAN LEAD A NEW EFFORT TOWARDS RECONCILIATION WITH VIETNAM FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH. BY MAPPING OUT A PROGRAMME FROM WHICH THE VIETNAMESE CAN BENEFIT, THE PREDICATING IT UPON PEACEFUL AND ORDERLY INTRA-REGIONAL CONDUCT, THE U.S. CAN CONTINUE TO SHAPE EVENTS TOWARDS SOUTHEAST ASIAN STABILITY."

3. COMMENT: IT IS LIKELY THAT ST EDITORIAL WAS EITHER WRITTEN IN MFA OR VETTED BY MFA PRIOR TO PUBLICATION. DURING CONVERSATION WITH MFA OFFICER ON SEPTEMBER 15, EMBASSY OFFICER INQUIRED WHETHER VIEWS EXPRESSED IN EDITORIAL WERE CONSONANT WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM'S COMMENTS ON SRV UN MEMBERSHIP REPORTED REFTEL. MFA OFFICIAL (KESAVAPANY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION) HAD NO QUALMS ABOUT DEFENDING EDITORIAL STATING THAT HE SAW NO DISCREPANCY BETWEEN RAJA'S COMMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT TO AMBASSADOR (REFTEL) POSITION TAKEN IN EDITORIAL. KESAVAPANY NOTED THAT CRITICISM OF U.S. ACTION CONTAINED IN ST EDITORIAL HAD MORE TO DO WITH "TACTICS" SURROUNDING DECISION TO VETO RATHER THAN WITH "STRATEGY" OF VETO PER SE. HE NOTED THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE HAD FREQUENTLY PLEADED FOR TIME FOR ASEAN TO ADJUST ITSELF TO NEW REALITIES IN THE REGION. HAD INTENDED U.S. VETO OF HANOI'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP BEEN TRIED TO MORE THAN JUST MIA ISSUE, NO MATTER HOW SENSITIVE THIS ISSUE IS POLITICALLY IN THE U.S., SINGAPORE'S AND U.S.'S INTERESTS IN REGION WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SERVED.

4. DESPITE KESAVAPANY'S ARGUMENT, WE THINK EDITORIAL'S ADVOCACY OF BOTH U.S. "NON-OPPOSITION" TO VIETNAM'S ENTRY INTO THE UN " PROVIDED IT IS TIED TO SRV GOOD
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BEHAVIOR," AND A FRESH U.S. "POSITIVE APPROACH TOWARD INDOCHINA" REPRESENT A FURTHER DEVELOPMENT IN GOS THINKING INDICATING SOME CHANGE IN ITS POSITION. IN HIS PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, REPORTED REFTEL, RAJARATNAM WAS CLEARLY HOPING THAT THE U.S. WOULD OPPOSE OR ADOPT MOVES TO DELAY SRV ADMISSION TO THE UN, AND, IF SO, HE PLANNED TO CHALLENGE THE SRV STANCE TOWARD THE ASEAN COUNTRIES IN HIS SPEECH BEFORE THE UNGA.

IN THAT CONVERSATION, HE DID NOT SAY THAT U.S. OPPOSITION WOULD BE HELPFUL ONLY IF IT WERE JUSTIFIED AND CARRIED OUT IN A CERTAIN WAY. HOWEVER, IN THE THREE WEEKS WHICH HAVE ELAPSED SINCE THAT DISCUSSION RAJA MAY HAVE REFINED HIS THINKING FURTHER AND ALSO DISCOVERED THAT THE OTHER ASEAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE LITTLE INTEREST IN OPPOSING SRV ADMISSION TO THE UN OR EVEN CONDITIONING THEIR SUPPORT FOR SRV ADMISSION ON ITS PROPER BEHAVIOR TOWARD THE ASEAN COUNTRIES. NOW THAT THE THREAT OF THE U.S. VETO HAS BLOCKED SRV EFFORTS TO BE ADMITTED TO THE UN, THE GOS (THROUGH THE STRAITS TIMES) CAN SAFELY CRITICIZE U.S. TACTICS WHILE BENEFITING FROM THE DELAY THIS HAS CAUSED.

5. ASSUMING QUESTION OF SRV ADMISSION TO THE UN WILL BE RAISED AGAIN IN NOVEMBER, U.S. WILL PROBABLY IN THE INTERIM BE THE BENEFICIARY OF CONTINUING ADVICE ON TACTICS FROM THE GOS, NAMELY, THAT WE SHOULD USE OUR VETO POWER TO EXTRACT FROM THE SRV ASSURANCES OF GOOD BEHAVIOR TOWARD ITS NEIGHBORS, AND THAT IT WILL BE MORE HELPFUL TO THE ASEAN GOVERNMENTS IF WE DO NOT RELY SOLELY ON THE MIA ISSUE WHICH IS IRRELEVANT TO SEA INTERESTS. IN VIEW OF THRUST OF ST EDITORIAL WE THINK THAT WHEN RAJA ADDRESSES THE UNGA HE MAY WELL EXPRESS MISGIVINGS OVER SRV ATTITUDE TOWARD ASEAN COUNTRIES, BUT WILL SUPPOR SRV ADMISSION INTO UN PROVIDED IT BEHAVES PROPERLY TOWARD ITS NEIGHBORS.
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